



## Engagement in a Major Metropolitan Research University

Lattie F. Coor  
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**O**f the many valuable concepts introduced by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, none is more evocative than that of the engaged institution.

Designed, as it is, to replace our historic terminology of "service," the concept of "engagement" truly captures the spirit that must drive the great public universities for the future. The concept of engagement carries with it a commitment to the long-term bonding of the capacities of the great public research universities to the needs and interests of the society we serve.

Given the complexity of issues facing our communities today, the expertise and talent of our universities is needed more than ever before. At the same time, public confidence in our value and public endorsement of our budgets appears to have waned in recent years. As we move into the new millennium, our universities need to demonstrate as never before our value to the larger society.

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At Arizona State University (ASU), this translates into a need to engage the issues of a major metropolitan area — air quality, K-12 education, quality of neighborhoods, the economy — and so we have committed ourselves as full-fledged, continuing partners in the policy arena of Metropolitan Phoenix, our primary service area.

At ASU, this is simply a re-commitment to our reason for being.

Arizona State University was founded more than a century ago as a Normal School charged with the responsibility of preparing teachers to serve the Arizona Territory. As the Territory grew to statehood and Phoenix to the state capital, the Normal School evolved into a Teacher's College and then a State College, reflecting the expanding needs of the community. In 1958, Arizona State College became

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Arizona State University by public referendum. ASU is now the only major research university serving metropolitan Phoenix, one of the fastest growing regions of the country. Surely there is no university history more compatible with the concept of engagement.

For us, it is a continuing and growing commitment, and we have come to recognize that, given the multi-faceted nature of a major metropolitan research university, there are many shapes and kinds of engagement. Let me comment about three:

• ASU's Morrison Institute for Public Policy regularly joins with our major statewide daily newspaper, the *Arizona Republic*, to make research on leading policy issues readily available to the community. In conjunction with two major community leadership groups, the Greater Phoenix Economic Council and the Greater Phoenix Leadership Council, the university and the newspaper list the leading issues of concern to the metropolitan area and offer an annual report card on the community's progress in addressing those issues.

• Second, we have worked much more actively than we would have historically to develop and fund broad-based multi-disciplinary research that promises real value to the community at the same time it advances significant scientific understanding of the problems under study.

A splendid example of this commitment is the ten-year Long Term Environmental Research project, funded by the National Science Foundation. The project enables our Center for Environmental Studies to conduct a long-term environmental review of metropolitan Phoenix, as well as the impact our rapid growth is having on the ecology of the region. We have been able to bring fifty-eight faculty members from multiple disciplines together with more than twenty-five community partners to participate in the study.

• Third, as with many other universities, we have involved significant numbers of faculty and students in a variety of Service Learning programs. These programs allow us to make a major difference in the community, primarily through the tutoring of youngsters; and, at the same time, our students gain valuable educational experience.

The student enthusiasm is nothing short of overwhelming when it comes to Service Learning. Students have contributed more than 200,000 direct contact hours since we introduced the opportunity in 1994 and the response from their community partners is truly heartening.

Each semester more faculty recognize the potential Service Learning offers to combine inquiry-based research activities and/or classroom-based instruction with meaningful community involvement. At the same time, the community awakens to the value and spectrum of resources in its university.

As we are committed to engaging the real problems of our community, and engaging them in ways that make a difference, we also are committed to becoming more visible, more accessible to

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state leadership and the public. We have worked energetically to bring more of the leadership of the community to the campus for activities designed to give them a hands-on understanding of what a major research university is and what it can mean to the future of the community.

We began with a series of campus visits called Sneaker Tours, in which our visitors could spend half-a-day sampling the university. We have since added a Community Enrichment Program which enables community leaders to engage in a wide array of activities from great book conversations, to lectures on major work the university has underway, to community-based discussion of issues of importance to the future of the metropolitan area.

One of the abiding questions as we seek to institutionalize our engagement with the community we serve is how best to ensure an adequate and continuing stream of resources to enable us to be truly responsive partners.

As a non-land-grant institution, ASU has never had the equivalent of a line-item budget for extension, experiment stations or similarly targeted outreach activities. This discipline has conditioned us to funding ASU outreach through a combination of internal university funds, traditional extramural funds (such as Housing and Urban Development grants for community development), and community-based partnerships, where the community partners make clear, ongoing commitments.

We have had encouraging results in identifying new forms of partner funding in this last category. For example, a corporate donor has agreed to earmark a portion of its multi-million dollar commitment to the university's current capital campaign to community-based programs. One of these is an Urban Fellows program which brings community leaders into year-long fellowships-in-residence at the university.

Additionally, leading banks and other businesses are providing generous support to programs that encourage community-based partnerships and economic development activities such as our Center for the Advancement of Small Business initiative designed to involve members of the Hispanic community more actively in small business and entrepreneurial activities.

This is equally true for engagements that link university resources with economic development and work force needs in the state. Two prominent microelectronics corporations are partnering with the ASU east campus, for example, to enhance and expand a microelectronics teaching factory for state of the art instruction and research, a double benefit to students and industry.

When it comes to organization, we have not developed a definitive structure for the University's outreach and engagement efforts, opting instead to encourage and facilitate as many activities as possible throughout the university.

I have, however, appointed a senior executive assistant to the president to oversee the development of our overall strategy and to

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tie ASU's community-based endeavors to the strategic plan for the three campuses in metropolitan Phoenix that make up ASU.

This may not be as tidy an arrangement as some would like, but it enables us to encourage a variety of ways to expand the university's participation in community-based activities.

In conclusion, during the past decade, our traditional resources for teaching, research, and service have begun to transform in ways that we believe will foster, strengthen, and energize collaborative engagement throughout the university and with a broader range of community constituencies.

As we review our progress to date, we acknowledge we have not yet found an effective way to address the knotty issue of faculty incentives and rewards as it relates to engagement. A recent university study of ways in which we might focus clearer light on the

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meaning of "service" as part of faculty evaluation and compensation has helped us begin that conversation, but we realize we have major work to do on this topic.

I have come to believe that, even as we develop an effective way to incorporate acknowledgment and support for faculty involvement in issues of engagement, that the most likely way to reward these activities will come through institutional

emphasis on the faculty members and units involved in these activities.

Even as we explore issues of recognition and reward, our faculty continue to show substantial interest in community-based endeavors, and we are seeking to use the existing mechanisms of grant funds, release time and financial incentives to support that interest.

The momentum of our choices is moving us toward being a more fully engaged institution, one in which traditional university activities and expertise have increasing relevance for and involvement by the community.

Our university-community roots are deep and intertwined. The symbiotic engagement that produced the university is more important than ever before, both to the institution and to the community it serves. I believe these are the activities that will most effectively and importantly define not only Arizona State University, but all our institutions as we move into the twenty-first century. ■

#### About the Author

Lattie F. Coor (Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis) became the fifteenth president of Arizona State University on January 1, 1990.

For the preceding thirteen years, from 1976 through 1989, he served as president of the University of Vermont. When he assumed the position, he

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was only 39 and one of the youngest university presidents in the nation. Earlier in his career, Coor served as an assistant to the Governor of the State of Michigan and held faculty appointments in Political Science at Washington University. His administrative responsibilities there included those of assistant to the chancellor, assistant dean of the Graduate School, director of International Studies, vice chancellor and university vice chancellor.

He holds or has held positions with a variety of higher education associations, boards and commissions and served as a founding member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's President's Commission. He held the position of chairman of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges in 1992-93 and served on the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education from 1990 to 1993.

An Arizona native, Coor was born in Phoenix and graduated with honors from Northern Arizona University in 1958. He pursued graduate studies in political science at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, earning a master's degree in 1960 and a doctoral degree in 1964.